



# Interfaith Perspectives Challenge Wider Unity



**By Bruce Van Voorhis, Claus Grue and Jupiter Sitorus**

“Promoting interfaith dialogue must begin from the principle of the acceptance of others. “Faith is dialogical. Faith is dialogical first between God and human beings and second among human beings,” said Dr. Musdah Mulia, President of the Indonesian Conference on Religion for Peace (ICRP) and a lecturer at Islamic State University Syarif Hidayatullah in Jakarta.

She was speaking on ‘Interfaith Perspectives of Living together in the household of God’, the theme of the CCA Assembly. A variety of interfaith perspectives from the teachings, traditions and wisdom of Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and Christianity were presented to enrich the understanding of the delegates on the assembly’s theme of “Living Together in the Household of God.”

The importance of interfaith dialogue to Islam has been present since the origins of the faith in Mecca and Medina, said Dr. Musdah Mulia. She cited four cornerstones in Islam on which peacebuilding through interfaith dialogue rest, such as the Medina Pact and his Last Sermon.

In the Medina Pact, she said, an agreement was reached with Jews, Christians and idol worshippers in which the

Prophet (pbuh) accepted all parties to the pact, regardless of their religion, as one ummah, or people. In this pact, religious freedom was recognized as a core value and right, and all members of the pact were to be treated equally by the governing authority. The Last Sermon addressed to Muslims and non-Muslims, contain all of the basic principles of human rights, and it can be considered the first “Charter of Human Rights” as well as a foundation for peaceful coexistence among all people and a message promoting interfaith dialogue.

The four principles that must be realized to establish interfaith dialogue are the principles of humanity, of one family, of democracy and of religious pluralism.

“As a religious community, we tend to take on the position of God by acting arrogant and being judgmental. In all honesty, we tend to judge and find fault in others instead of devoting ourselves to each other and caring for each other. We always claim to be in the right and others are always wrong, misguided and infidels. As a result, religion-based wars and conflicts become the main stories in the media.”

2 “In living together, we must always maintain our position as human beings, not as God,” she emphasized. “Our task as humans is only to try our utmost to do good as much as we are able to do, leave everything else to God.”

In speaking about the principle of one family, she noted that “the enemy of all religions is no other than injustice, oppression, greed, ignorance and poverty. Once we have this awareness, as people of faith, we can work together to eradicate the common enemy.”

In working together, Mulia, however, is not content to talk about problems.

“I propose a form of dialogue in action where the actions of supporters of interfaith ideologies are used to transform the community to become a more just and humanitarian society. In other words, enlightenment and transformation at a personal level are not enough. Dialogue participants have to make social transformations, and this transformation must be carried out across all religions.”

“I do believe that interfaith dialogue is not only possible but is also necessary to engender an appropriate understanding of other religions,” she concluded.

Her words resonated with Ven. Banagala Upatissa, president of the Mahabodi Society of Sri Lanka and the chief sangha nayaka for Japan: “For most people in Asia, religion is their life. Religion is in their body. We have to live equally with each other and respect each other. If you don’t respect others, they won’t respect you.”

Citing a simple wise teaching from Buddhism, he said, “Do good; don’t do bad. Whatever you do, do it with a very pure heart. Hatred never ceases by hatred; hatred is stopped by love.”

He then, like Mulia, linked faith with action. “When your stomach is burning, when you are in hunger, you can’t think of God, you can’t think of Buddha. The first and most important thing is food. Since we all have enough food, we don’t think of others begging on the streets. We are here though to serve the people. We are here to show our followers the correct path. If not, there is no need for me to wear this yellow robe.”

Stating that Buddhism is a religion of tolerance, Ven. Upatissa said “The absolute spirit of tolerance is the most fundamental principle to the teachings of the Buddha. Buddhism prohibits attempts to force others to accept our beliefs. Buddhism, with an open and accommodating attitude to other religions, does not claim a monopoly on truth which must be self-realized and cannot be imposed on others.”

“In line with this reasoning and widely tolerant attitude, the Buddha encouraged his followers to listen to other teachings with an open and critical mind. When others challenged him, he convinced them, by rational ways, the folly of their attachment to dogmatic views.”

Speaking from the Hindu perspective on the CCA Assembly

theme, Swami Isa explained the interconnectedness of all life through his “I Theory”, which is based on the unifying theory of energy. A Hindu spiritual leader and theoretical scientist from Trivandrum, India, Swami Isa explained that “everything in the universe is made of energy or vibration. A single unit of vibration is the fundamental particle—the so-called building block of the universe. One of these units is called the ‘I’.

In relating his thinking to human beings, he said that “thought creates emotion. Emotion is energy that pushes us to do something. Thought and emotion are disturbing, and we have to find a way to remove these disturbances.”

“How can I be happy is the question of all philosophies. Life only becomes fulfilled through happiness. Life has no value otherwise.”

In a separate interview, Swami Isa said, “People should have the awareness that, being an individual, he or she is also an integral part of the world. Each thought, emotion and action will affect not only one and one’s family but also society and the world. Loving oneself is loving the world.”

Most obstacles in living together in harmony, Swami Isa added, are when people live with their negative energy. Therefore, people have to be educated to live with positive energy so that people live in consciousness and impart it to others all over the world.

In sharing the Christian perspective, Dr. Tong Wing-sze, director of Tao Fong Shan Christian Center in Hong Kong and an adjunct professor at the Divinity School of Chung Chi College at Chinese University and at Lutheran Theological Seminary, said that “we cannot live together in the household of God alone without relating with other faiths.”

“The first step of living together in peace is through going home to ourselves; the second step in this process, she explained, is to go home to our neighbor, but who is our neighbor, and how do we reach out to them? To find our neighbor, we must be in touch with our culture and the land,” she said.

The final step in the journey is to go home to God, said Tong, but the path to God seems even more difficult to find than that of our neighbor. “We can go back to God by hearing the suffering of the people,” she added.

This suffering fills the pages of newspapers and the airwaves of radio and television. Like other speakers before her, she joins faith with witness.

From the interfaith contributions of the speakers on Monday, living together in the household of God has meaning and relevance if people of faith are willing to express their relationship with the Divine through engaging with the man-made tragedies of this world.

In the words again of Ven. Upatissa, “Hatred is stopped by love.”

# CCA in Perspective: Beyond Living Together



For the past 58 years, the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) had marked significant events in the life and history of the ecumenical movement in Asia. Not only had it brought churches and ecumenical partners together for fellowship but it enabled a bigger space for dialogue and unity where churches could respond significantly to what needs to be done in the “Oikoumene”, the whole inhabited earth.

Time and again, the 14th General Assembly has etched a significant page in the history of CCA bringing together representatives of 101 member churches and 17 national councils into a common ground where they can set aside their differences and talk about their common concerns.

## *Direction-setting for CCA*

The Assembly, during its week long deliberations provided an open space for participants to discern the ecumenical responses in the light of Asian issues. Some of these themes included: mission and witness in multi-religious Asia; ecumenical formation and theological education; prophetic diakonia and ecumenical advocacy; moving beyond conflicts and building peace with justice; health and healing as new imperatives for ecumenical actions; communicating within the fellowship and beyond; and financial sustainability and organizational management.

The Sarasehan as well as the Committee on Public Issues provided ample opportunities for participants to bring up social realities from their own context. Some of these significant major issues raised to the committee include: human trafficking, peace and security; climate justice; displacement of people due to conflicts; violence of women and children, among others.

After days of tiring work and relentless discussions, you

may find yourself in retrospection: What’s next for CCA?

The Assembly has been a venue for Asian churches to reflect on how CCA should respond to the diverse and rapidly changing realities in Asia. More than just reflecting on the main concerns, the real challenge is how the churches can be more socially relevant and realize their common witness as a church.

An equally important question is how we, as CCA and as a church, can go beyond living together and translate our faith perspectives into active and concrete acts of love and compassion so that we can bring transformation not only in Asia but to the world?

Asia has a distinct and rich cultural heritage – a home to profound cultural traditions and spirituality. And yet our history is also a history of constant struggle and resistance to dominations and decrepit systems in our society. We celebrate a strong and wide movement not only within the bounds of the church but a movement of all peoples who continue to struggle for justice and peace.

As a relevant community of churches in Asia, we must go beyond living together by coming out of our comfort zones of conservatism and reactionary tendencies by journeying with the people in their continuing struggles. We must go beyond living together by addressing the systems and structures that steal the very dignity of life. We must go beyond living together by affirming our roles and being in the forefront of reshaping our unfolding history and consciously transforming the world with the strong movement of peoples.

Together, we must work towards birthing a new Oikoumene where justice and peace exist, and where everyone lives a life in all its fullness.

# Churches Engaging in Disaster Response



*By Jupiter Sitorus*

The East Japan Triple Disaster rudely shook the world out of its slumber and indifference regarding the growing danger of nuclear installations. As the disasters redrew the contours of the map of Japan in the affected areas, and people who survived left the place fearing nuclear radiation, the churches in Japan rallied round to help the victims. Thus was born the Japan Ecumenical Disaster Response Office (JEDRO) developed by the National Council of Churches in Japan (NCCJ) which rendered yeoman service to the affected people for years.

Rev. Makoto Kato, General Secretary and voting delegate of the Uniting Church of Christ in Japan (UCCJ), in an interview with Sarasehan, said that JEDRO that started functioning soon after the great East Japan Earthquake in March 2011 has already closed down. However, the NCCJ will still continue its program to support disaster area's recovery based on the cooperation with ACT alliance. The JEDRO activities were mainly to organize donation from inside and outside of Japan. There were two main problems that were left in the wake of the disaster, first: the impact of disaster to the environment and population and the second, threatening to the status of nuclear power technology itself in Japan.

The huge impact of the East Japan Disaster on environment and population still remains. It covers a very large area in Tohoku Region which includes Iwate Prefecture, Miyagi Prefecture, and Fukushima Prefecture who suffered from the major damaged of accident. More than 100 thousand people still live in the secluded area since their home

could not be occupied anymore. They have lost their jobs and suffer from serious diseases. The recovery of area is still in progress but the short term and long term effects of radioactivity have become genuine and a real problem that will remain for long.

People around the impacted area blame nuclear power technology as a dangerous technology that should be prohibited in Japan. Rev. Kato mentioned that the churches have supported a movement that urges to discard the construction of Nuclear Power Plant in Japan. Further in the spirit of article 9 of the Japanese constitution, popularly known as the Peace constitution, the Japanese people would rather build peaceful relations, reconciliation, equality, mutual respect and help, than promote an arms build-up. However, contradictorily, the government wishes to re-commission the shut-down nuclear power plant for fulfilling the energy requirements of the country. This dilemma could threaten the status of nuclear power technology development for peaceful purposes in Japan. Japan is one of the countries that provide nuclear power technology. Many of the Indonesian scientists and engineers have studied nuclear technology in Japan University.

In this discussion, the interviewer still hopes that Japan could find more advanced strategies for the peaceful use of nuclear technology, as he believes that God provided Uranium on earth and mineral by purpose, for the use of energy for the benefit of all people.

# CCA Takes Health and Healing on its Agenda

By Ismael Fisco Jr.



In the face of many challenges confronting churches in Asia today, the issue of health and healing remains a significant concern that compels serious attention. Thus, the CCA included this in its agenda on one of its Saresehan discussions at the general assembly, May 23rd.

Three respected speakers who have notable works on these areas shared their inputs that helped guide the participants in drafting recommendations for presentation to the assembly: Dr. Samuel Kabue, Consultant and Executive Secretary for Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network (EDAN); Dr. Erlinda Senturias, Board Member of the Human Rights Victims' Claims Board; and Dr. Sigit Wijayanta, Deputy for Humanitarian, Development and Advocacy Christian Foundation for Public Health (Yakkum) Indonesia.

In their individual presentations, the speakers proposed that the issue of health and healing must not only be taken from the perspective of physical disease or disability. It must address the social stigma and discrimination that exist in the society.

“Healing as a means of reconciliation in respect to the ministry to persons with disabilities had two complementally dimensions. These are cure and restoration. Restoration has been seen in this context as what could be defined as healing to distinguish it from cure.”

“What was and still is most important in our reconciliation message is the acceptance, inclusion and restoration into the mainstream of the society,” said Dr. Kabue who himself is a person living with disability.

Dr. Wijayanta reflected on the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) in the context of realities in Asia. He said that despite high economic growth claimed by the governments, there is still a problem in the availability, accessibility and affordability of medical technologies to cater the health need of the people.

He challenged the church to focus on the resilience and healing congregation, and also shared about the global strategy that needs to be done by the ACT Alliance and CCA in terms of dealing with the issues of health and healing.

In her speech, Dr. Senturias, emphasized two important concerns about health: trauma and HIV-AIDS. She said that a lot of people experience trauma which may arise from their childhood or caused by unfavourable circumstances such as conflicts among communities and countries. Over the years, there was also a growing number of HIV cases registered in some Asian countries.

“In dealing with these issues, we have to look at the root causes of the problem such as the political structure, (including) our belief systems. What causes ill health, the totality of our personality, how we can eliminate stigma, understand poverty together and promote a supportive community,” Senturias said.

She also lifted up four points that must be considered as ecumenical advocacy initiatives of the ecumenical movement: promotion of life in all its fullness as paradigm of health and healing; revitalizing primary health care; supporting the need for the healing of trauma; and building HIV competent and compassionate churches.

All the speakers and participants agreed that the ecumenical movement must take this seriously and take all possible costs to advocate for health and healing towards the restoration of life for all.

“Therefore, the overall theological contribution of the healing narratives in the New Testament is to demonstrate or serve as signs of God’s salvation history. God wills the acceptance and inclusion of each in community of interdependence where each supports and builds up the other, and where each lives life to the full according to the circumstances and to the glory of God,” concluded Dr. Kabue.

## Saw Patrick Loo Nee: “Everything done so well”



*By Markus Saragih*

The 14th CCA Assembly has entered the fourth day. Mr. Nce experiences that everything was very well organized with sincere hospitality. This is really an excellent job. He, Mr. Saw Patrick Loo Nee, from Myanmar Council of Churches, said “We stay at a very beautiful place in Jakarta City which also fantastic. No doubt that everything is well arranged by host arrangement committee, HKBP, with love, hospitality, and stewardship. I think Indonesia has capacity to do such important conferences, which might be many other countries could not make it, like my country Myanmar. It requires certain standard that Myanmar do not have it yet. We hope one day we can do it.”

He saw that 400 hundreds participants who participated on this conference were not felt an isolated but instead they are all very warm. By staying at the same hotel all participants are allowed to spend time for talking to each other and doing the works together. I really thankful to be able to come to this conference and I hope, since this is the first time for me to be here one here or the third time to attend CCA meeting, in the next five or ten years, there will be other opportunity for us to come back here where Indonesia become more florist, of course, if we are still alive.”

Patrick, who have ever stayed in Jakarta since 2005 until 2009 hope that the assembly should focus on special issues that we are facing a lot in social issues, especially religious freedom in Asia. “We work together in unity as a Christian since many of us are minority in our own

country. If we are united, we can have a voice and send an awareness to others. As a family members of God, although we do not speak on same language, but mostly we look very similar.”

Talking about Myanmar, he said, “Myanmar is changing a lot and now we are coming to a very important moment where we are going to have an election at the end of this year. I am not very concern on politics, but anyway our church are still there, it is a big witness to all the people.”

### LOUD THOUGHTS:

Hashtag #CCAassembly on Twitter Post!

**BADIA TARIGAN** (@badiaonline) · 23 Mei  
Photo: It's so much fun in here. So glad to meet, share, and playing with you guys #CCAassembly #Ancol. [tumblr.co/Z54eRxt1SkkTU](https://tumblr.co/Z54eRxt1SkkTU)

Tumblr



# Tugu Church



**By Markus Saragih**

worship have still served by Portuguese congregation in Jakarta (now Sion Church). In 1678 then Rev. Melchior Leydecker built a first church out side Jakarta for worship and school activities. In 1738 the second Tugu Church building was build replacing the old building that has been destructed.

During the Chinese ethnic rebellion and the Chinese killing (China Onluste) year 1740 in Batavia, Tugu Church building which was under the second phase of construction has been destructed. In 1737 Tugu Church was renovated under leadership of Rev. Van de Tydt and assisted by a Portuguese pastor named Ferreira d'Almeida and the Mardijkers.

In 1774, a land lord named Yustinus Vinck who lived in Cilincing then supported to rebuild the church and the building has finally been finished on July 29, 1747, and on 27 July 1748 the church building has been launched by Rev. J. M. Mohr.

The Portuguese tradition is strongly felt when we visit Kampung Tugu. To be sure, it is related to the origin of Kampung Tugu people who are the native Portuguese. Some Portuguese traditions could immediately be found in Kampung Tugu daily life, such as Christmas and New Year celebration, harvest party, rabo-rabo or bathing tradition accompany by Kroncong music which were originally from Portuguese music named fado.

Up to now Kampung Tugu people could be proud of themselves because their creativity in Kroncong music then came into existence the words "Kroncong Tugu" as a variant of kroncong music played by Kampung Tugu people.

There is a tourism object close to Hotel Mercure, the venue of the CCA General Assembly, an old church named Tugu.

Tugu Church has been determined by government as a cultural heritage, located at Kampung Tugu (Tugu Village) in North Jakarta. According to historians, Kampung Tugu is the oldest village in the eastern area of Jakarta City. It is called Kampung Tugu because there is a historical heritage of King Mulawarman from Tarumanegara was found here, that was an inscription (tugu). But another version said that the word tugu derived from a Portuguese a cut off Por-tugu-ese, a name was given by Portuguese who occupied Kampung Tugu.

At present, Tugu Church building is not the first original building of Tugu Church. When the first Tugu inhabitants arrived in Kampung Tugu on 1678, their

## SARASEHAN

is the official newsletter of the 14th General Assembly of CCA.

**Editorial Staff:** Communications Director:

Susan Jacob - **Writers:** Ismael Fisco, Jr. Bruce

Van Voorhis - **Local Media Group:** Jupiter Sitorus, Ramli Sirait, Baharuddin Silaen, Surya Samudera Giamsjah, Markus Saragih, Irma Simanjuntak, Rainy Hutabarat, Vesto Proklamanto, Baharuddin Silaen - **Design and Layout:** Kristono



# Reflections on the Asia Ecumenical Course



**By Dn. Abin P Jacob**

Voice of St. Paul, the apostle still echoes loud and appears to be most appealing to the twenty first century society, wherein his words, 'He came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near, for through him we both have access in one spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the capstone.' (Ephesians 2. 17-20)

We are the young people, diverse and dynamic, from fourteen countries representing different churches, national councils, enriched by our own cultures and realities who met together for the two week long Asian Ecumenical Course, with the theme of the 14th General Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia 'Living together in the Household of God' at the Jakarta Theological Seminary and Mercure Convention Centre, Ancol, Jakarta from 16 – 26 May 2015.

Here we were brought face to face with the existential realities persistent in the world, marred by voices and echoes of the people and nature who are often 'sinned against'. The groaning earth, the suffering and oppressed marginalized brothers and sisters in Christ who are suffering because of the injustice and inequality that prevails in the world in terms of impoverization, unemployment, environmental degradation, human rights violation, lack of education, discrimination, migration and terrorism.

The course enlightened us to realize our responsibility as the beacons of that great light in the brokenness of the world. We were empowered to take up the challenge in the renewal of the church and society by fulfilling our prophetic role to be agents of justice, peace and reconciliation. We are also in acceptance of our inability and inaction and apathy to the situation of the marginalized and silent support to the oppressors.

The course helped us to broaden our horizons and instilled in us a vigor and spirit of pursuing the spirit of humanness, oneness and amity amongst us by removing the parochialism that divides us. It invigorated significant dimensions in realizing the power in unity among brethren, which is a decisive force that pervades the notion of uniformity, it being the rule of the universe. The Trinitarian God puts before us the model for 'unity in diversity'. The strength when sisters and brothers coexist in peace and justice in an egalitarian society is the manifestation of the divine. Finding unity amidst the distinctiveness of life instilled the thought that being united confers the strength to be the agents of 'Missio Dei' by becoming co-sufferers and co-sojourners in the pains and afflictions of the fellow beings and attributing to them a life of dignity and worth from womb to tomb.

## In the Household of God

(AEC Reflection)

*Lyrics: Sora Enomoto*

*Composer: Mak Chi-Lap, Paul*

In the household of God people are crucified  
In the household of God, people are crying  
In the household of God, nature is mourning.

*Open our eyes so that we can see what you see  
Open our ears so that we can listen what you listen  
Let's be in solidarity, with our people,  
With their memories and with their hope*

In the household of God, people are rejoicing  
In the household of God, people are celebrating  
In the household of God, whole creation is singing.